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A WASHINGTON ENIGMA

by

GEORGE S. H. L. WASHINGTON, M.A., F.S.A.

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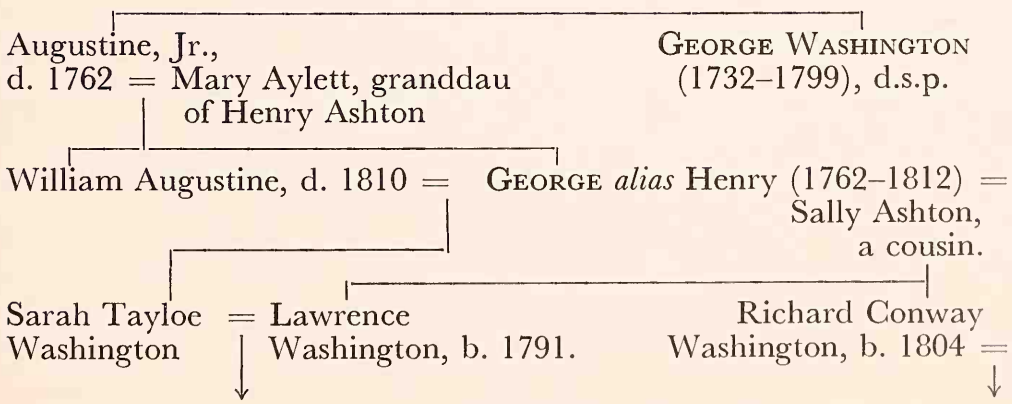
George Washington has been frequently called the purest character in history; he is the one member of the white race to be allowed into the Chinese heaven; and no researcher in the hundred and eighty two years since his death has managed to discover any evidence that seriously upsets this verdict. Yet *The Times* has recently printed a tantalising drawing of George showing his right eye drooping in an unmistakable wink, which seems to be justified by the bizarre link (which only George could possibly have arranged) that enables me to claim, against all probability, to be the legitimate head of the Washington family today. For there is never smoke without some fire; and the claim itself, which has always been secretly accepted in Virginia, is I think too amusing and too harmless to be concealed any longer from the genealogical public.

The link, as I say, has both tradition and legal evidence behind it, and is in fact easily explained. Thus, George's elder half-brother, Augustine Washington, Jr., mentions in a codicil to his will of 1762 an infant son, *George*, who disappears* and is never heard of again but who had evidently survived under the name of *Henry* (a name derived no doubt from his maternal grandfather, Col. Henry Ashton). Henry, *alias* George, in due course married his cousin, Sally Ashton, by whom he left a large family, whose names are duly entered in his family Bible, now in my possession. He served as Sheriff of Westmoreland Co., Virginia in 1792, and in 1797 sold his estate there to Judge Bushrod Washington and settled in Alexandria, where he died in 1812, leaving an eldest son, Lawrence (born 1791), who is always said to have married Sarah Tayloe Washington, his *half-sister*. This amazing assertion has been allowed to pass unchallenged, although it is of course impossible on the face of it; since the

* His baptism in 1762 is recorded in the parish register of Aquia Church, Virginia.

whole mystery is resolved by Henry Washington's Admon. of October, 1812 (preserved in the Orphans Court of Alexandria), which states that Henry's minor children had been assigned by the Court to the custody of Bushrod Washington, Esq., as nearest relative. The only person who could be thus described was the infant George Washington, born in 1762, who appeared to have changed his name to Henry during his minority. The latter's elder brother, William Augustine (died 1810), had also had *his* minor children assigned to Bushrod Washington's custody; and one of these was the Sarah Tayloe Washington who afterwards became the wife of Lawrence Washington, not her half-brother but her first cousin, and who were themselves well remembered as "Aunt Sally" and "Uncle Lawrence" by my father in his own youth in Washington, D.C.

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